

[The Virginia Statewide Neighborhood Conference Annual Neighborhood Awards Program](#)

Award Nomination for Hume Springs Citizens Association – Thursday Night Tutoring

1. How did the project contribute to improving the quality of life in the neighborhood?

When neighbors of the wonderfully diverse Hume Springs Citizens Association area of Alexandria saw kids running around the neighborhood everyday after school, they started to ask them, “don’t you guys have any homework?” And time after time the youth replied that they did, but that they “didn’t have to do it!” After further questioning, they realized that the kids did indeed have homework, but some of their parents had challenges with working late and juggling multiple jobs, and for all of the parents, language barriers created communication gaps that left a lack in understanding of how to help their children with their homework. Given the facts that kids who do their homework 1) do better in school both academically and behaviorally and 2) make overall better choices, the neighbors of Hume Springs decided to organize and host Thursday Night Tutoring for children of all ages in the community.

What began as a small group with 2-3 kids and just a few tutors turned into 9-13 youth and 6-7 tutors each Thursday night. Starting in September and lasting throughout the school year, the group meets in the host tutor’s home at 5:30 p.m. to cook and share a healthy meal. By sharing a meal together first, the kids and adults have the nourishment they need after a long day, and it allows for them to spend quality time together to connect by asking each other how they’re doing and how their day went.

After the meal from 6-7 p.m. they work one-on-one or in small groups with the youth to assist them with their homework. The youth have goals for the program which are to 1) show up on time 2) try hard 3) be respectful 4) bring your homework and 5) a wild card-where the youth can just do something special for someone else. They keep track of their goals on big charts so they can see their progress and work toward incentives. This year, one of the incentives was an end of school field trip field to the lake for overnight camping and roasting marshmallows - all of which was provided by committed neighbors investing their time, skills and resources.

The kids and tutors alike come from diverse backgrounds. Some of the tutors are in their golden years; some are empty nesters looking to give back, and then some are single professionals who know that it takes a village to raise a child. The youth are first generation American and from all over the globe. Oftentimes, they are the bi-lingual and the primary English translators

in the home, which presents unique challenges both within and outside of the classroom.

The camaraderie for this program has brought people in the community closer together by raising the awareness of the issues that the youth face and creating an environment of understanding across cultures. When you go to the Hume Springs neighborhood, you will see people of all generations working toward bettering their community by helping out with homework, doing a community cleanup or just having fun for their annual National Night Out event.

2. How did the effort promote strengthening the neighborhood/Community for future success?

The Thursday Night Tutoring is a team effort where everyone involved contributes to its success. This is because each person has had to step out of our comfort zones and work hard. Whether it is taking the time to tutor a child and the patience that involves, cooking dinner after a long work day, or for the youth, doing your homework after a long day at school, everyone has to do their part to make Thursday nights work and meet the goals. They know that the pay-off will come when the youth have better test scores and bring their habits of discipline and being prepared back to the classroom. Stemming from this program, the youth are invested in their community and are giving back in many ways. And while these efforts are on a small scale at this point by picking up trash and helping a neighbor carry groceries, the long term effects are that they will continue giving back each stage in their lives as they grow and become more productive citizens of society.

Additionally, in these racially charged times, the cultural component of this program should not be ignored. The tutors, youth and their families are from vastly different parts of the world including El Salvador, Ethiopia and Sudan. Their cultures are very different and in a traditional setting, neither the adults nor the youth would come together for neighborhood programs. The Thursday Night Tutoring program is changing that. Here's an example:

One year ago, Ms. Sarah, one of the lead organizers and host for Thursday Night Tutoring attended a birthday party of one of the youth. While she was the exception, all of the other attendees were all of the same cultural background. Fast forward to the same child's birthday party this year, and Ms. Sarah was excited to see that all of the youth from Thursday Night Tutoring were at the party! This example shows what we can do when we come together for a common purpose and how this can light the spark for conversations and understanding that allows people to meet as humans rather than sticking to what we see by the color of our skin or countries of

origin. This is where true change takes place in communities and what we need to keep moving toward - and Thursday Night Tutoring is helping us get there.

3. Describe the positive results achieved as a result of the effort?

The positive results from Thursday Night Tutoring are many. For the youth, they are more plugged into their academics and as a result, academics had become more important to them and their families. They have also gained the valuable skills of time management; being prepared with homework; and of having goals and meeting them. They are learning the values of respect for others and themselves, of hard work and of never giving up. The parents too, are very grateful for the support and are more open and trusting of others from different cultural backgrounds than themselves.

Another result that stemmed from Thursday Night Tutoring is the Summer Supper Club. While the tutors thought they'd be taking a break for the summer, the youth requested to keep having the program. What came next was the Summer Supper Club, also on Thursday nights. Summer Supper Club includes sharing a healthy meal, but this time the youth are conducting research and writing a business plan. The reason being that they want to take another field trip to the trampoline park. Since the park costs money, which would present a financial burden for the families, the youth have developed a way to raise money in the community by having a car wash. They came up with the ideas and plan for the carwash through their research.

While Thursday Night Tutoring and Summer Supper Club was started for the kids, it is transforming the Hume Springs community for young and old alike. The kids in the program now have respect for their neighbors and their community and are positive role models for others. On any given day, you will see the youth cleaning up after trash has spilled on the sidewalks; helping a senior with carrying their groceries, or just sitting with a neighbor and sharing stories – stories that were not shared before. Because people used to just do their own thing and go about their own business. But now since the youth have built these bridges of connectedness, everyone knows each other and takes care of each other. We are a community.

Names of consistent tutors are: Sarah Bergen, Rich Hart, Angela and Brian Burton, Colleen Matthews, and Lizzy Mc'erlean and the late Ms. Betty who is always in our hearts.